Paris.

Leander.

Æneas.

Petrarch.

A Slave of Cleopatra.

Don Marquis Digs Up New Doubloons

Reviewed by
CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

SONNETS TO A RED-HAIRED LADY AND FAMOUS LOVE AFFAIRS. By Don Marquis. Doubleday, Page & Co.

WHEN THE SUN moved from Nassau street across City Hall Park to Broadway and Chambers a horrid rumor went the rounds. It was said that in transit Old Don Marquis had lost his scrapbooks. Every one knows that almost anything may happen in the confusion of moving. Newspaper men particularly are sedentary in their haunts: if you move them around some of them are sure to get lost. When my favorite evening paper (the *Evening Post*) left Broadway and Fulton street some fifteen years ago a number of the veteran printers in the outfit wandered for years among the tombs of St. Paul's Churchyard before they could find the new quarters. And I remember that just after THE SUN slid across the park I called on Mr. Marquis at lunch time. "Where shall we eat?" I said as we emerged from the building. "I can't imagine," he said, looking about him bewildered. "I don't know this part of town very well."

But we must be more concise. The point is that Mr. Marquis's scrapbooks might well have been lost in the shuffle, and there were some of us who feared for a while that some of Don's golden coinage of nonsense had been poured irretrievably into the great ocean of newspaper files—whence (knowing the indolence of our trade) we doubted he would ever have them copied. Happily the rumor proved to be exaggerated. Mr. Marquis's scrapbooks turned up, and in the last year or so he has been seining up from those coral beds and caves of emerald some of the choice doubloons of his fancy. "The Old Soak," "Noah and Jonah and Cap'n John Smith," "Poems and Portraits," and now the "Sonnets to a Red-Haired Lady"—these four volumes of collected ingots, within a year, show how wealthy a salvage those scrapbooks contained. And, thank Heaven, they relieve some of the lovers of Marquisiana from carrying about with them those faded, tattered clippings in their wallets—yellowed and crumbled little slices of newsprint whereby many of us have for months and even years preserved some of Mr. Marquis's best freaks.

Let us hope, incidentally, that the next plunder to be raised from the sea bottom of *Sun-Dial* files will be a collection of *The Almost Perfect State*.

That is not to be construed as a clumsy aspersion of the present new volume, *Sonnets to a Red-Haired Lady and Famous Love Affairs*. The Sonnets to a Red-Haired Lady are in Mr. Marquis's admirable vein of uproarious fancy and celestial ferocity. We might speak of them as the Welladay Sequence, as most of the brief epitaphs upon the hero's thirty unsatisfactory wives close with that lugubrious and old fashioned exclamation of wistfulness. Mr. Marquis is always the master of celestial vulgarity; he knows the kind of japes that archangels whisper to one another (under the covert of one lifted opaline wing, lest any of the new arriving blest should hear), and in this series he lets his

Adam.

innocent and affectionate savagery flash unsheathed. I admit that the Red-Haired series has never been quite such a favorite with me as the Savage Portraits (see the volume *Poems and Portraits*, but there are in it many lines of glittering absurdity. And Mr. Marquis is artist enough, as always, to conclude the murderous sequence with three or four sonnets of serious purport and beauty which will puzzle the boob reader when taken after the earlier pieces.

In the second section of the book—Famous Love Affairs—Mr. Marquis seems to me to rise to the summit of his now considerable series of comic masterpieces. He has always been at his best in treating traditionally lip served fetishes with delicate irreverence; his burlesques of such affinities as Paris and Helen, Cophetua and the Beggar Maid, Tristram and Isolt, Othello and Desdemona, Petrarch and Laura, Hero and Leander, are in his most fecund vein of comedy. They show that most satisfying level of gusto and skill which tempts the reader to think "How the rimes play into his hand and suggest the japes!" Ah, children, rimes don't eat salt out of your hand that way until you've associated with them for a long time. Consider the cunning use of the noble Chaucerian stanza in the takeoff of Tristram and Isolt. (These, remember, are not parodies; they are recreations of the familiar themes of romantic woe, in a mood of riotous ridicule.)

Of course, there is not much to be said about glorious funmaking of this sort except to urge readers to enjoy it for themselves. For example, of Paris and Helen:

He'd take her to see shows as hot
As if they had been peppered;
She'd blush . . . *he* never changed a spot:
He was a Moral Leopard!

And oft, with blushes that would make
Her brow and cheek and chin burn,
She'd listen while this Subtile Snake
Lisped her the pomes of Swinburne.

We doubt if any more penetrating comment was ever made on the Tennysonian idylls than this of Lancelot and Guinevere, those gloomy lovers whose pensive lack of enthusiastic wooing has discontented generations of schoolgirls:

The moral is: Observe your bent,
Your own traits mark and measure—
If one has not the temperament
Philandering isn't pleasure.

It's gorgeous stuff, sparking with that high voltage clowning that is only in the power of a humorist who is also a great poet and a great artist.

Tristram.

New English for Old

OLD ENGLISH POETRY. Translations into alliterative verse by J. Duncan Spaeth, Princeton, N. J. Princeton University Press.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, we are told, once remarked of a translation of "Beowulf"—"This poem has undoubtedly been translated out of Anglo-Saxon, but it has undoubtedly not been translated into English." That is the trouble with most attempts toward verbal accuracy and close imitations of Old English rhythms and alliteration; they are not intelligible to the modern reader; as hard to follow as Browning's unhappy versions of Aeschylus. But the other extreme, the attempt to make a modern poem or ballad version in fluent modern rhythms, is no more successful, as the life of the original evaporates. "A pretty poem, Mr. Pope, but why call it Homer?" "Beowulf" remains, in fact, even more untranslatable than the Iliad, and Cynewulf and the Biblical songs are only slightly less intractable. As Professor Spaeth remarks, "The only way to get accurately the movement of Old English verse is to learn to read it in Old English."

None the less, there is a happy middle ground, wherein, as this book shows, much can be accomplished. Professor Spaeth comes nearer to attaining the unattainable than any of his predecessors in this field. He demonstrates that "it is not impossible to reproduce for a wider circle of readers the spirit of the old rhythm by preserving its essential features in a form adaptable to the requirements of modern English speech." His versions are, for the most part, easily readable:

That is an admirable rendering of the opening lines of "Beowulf," but, even the reader ignorant of Anglo-Saxon can see that there is a difference in flavor, if he will read the words of the original aloud (we must use, here, th for the old letters, and ae for the *umlauted* vowels)—

The opening exclamation is significant; the whole movement is ejaculatory, and one needs to remember that, as Capt. Scott Moncrieff points out in apologizing for his own rugged version, "Old English poetry was composed not for the librarian but for the harpist," and was meant to be "shouted aloud to the harp string."

Prof. Spaeth, on the whole, is extraordinarily successful in holding on to as much of this strenuous quality as can safely be rendered in our milder idiom. He always avoids the pitfall of an unintentionally comic effect, and his version is steadily dignified, and often close to the vigor of the original. He also keeps pretty clear of temptation to use the many archaic or partially obsolete words—a fault which mars the otherwise astounding translations by Stopford Brooke. But even Prof. Spaeth sometimes demands very close attention and a bit of linguistic and syntactic gymnastics on the part of the reader, as is in such lines as

. . . For much shall suffer
Of lief and of loath who long endures
The days of his life in labor and toil.

It will call for some effort for most folk to rethink that elliptical sentence in a familiar word order, and to get the every day significance to his

King Cophetua.

mind of "lief" and "loath," in this poetic usage. But the effort is distinctly worth making, and most of the road which Prof. Spaeth travels makes easier going. And though he sometimes approaches a paraphrasing Prof. Spaeth keeps astonishingly close to the text, not only with the accurate scholarship which avoids any actual mistranslation but also with a subtler feeling for the spirit of the original. There need be no hesitation in saying that this book holds by far the most satisfactory rendition of the best portions of Old English poetry that has as yet been produced.

This volume, he tells us, is partly a natural outgrowth of class room work; experience made, in a way, in laboratory fashion, and tested upon the undergraduate dog. That they withstood that severe trial and created a demand for publication is itself a demonstration of efficiency. The book is aimed chiefly at the college or high school student, as part of a "survey" course in English, but it also has a wider appeal to all cultured readers. It is equipped with adequate notes and explanatory matter, and a partial bibliography. Indeed, the small essays introductory to the study of the heroic epic, the saint's legends, &c. amount to a pretty comprehensive sketch of Old English literature. They are not only sound in scholarship but beautifully lucid in their own English—and, be it said whisperingly, not every teacher of English literature has himself so fine a style and mastery of the language as Prof. Spaeth.

The book includes about two thirds of the "Beowulf," a brief extract from "Widsith," considerable passages from the Biblical epics, (the younger Genesis and Exodus) and selections from the saints' legends, including a part of the "Elene" and "Saint Guthlac." Then follow samples of the religious lyric poetry, from Caedmon and Cynewulf, and "the Phœnix," and specimens of the secular lyric, and of the riddles and gnomic poetry. The volume closes with the historic war verse of the "Battle of Bruna anburg" and "Battle of Maldon." The selections are made with good judgment, (but we cannot help regret that the "Judith" is not included) and some lacunæ are filled in by supplementary versions in the notes. One may hope that future editions may also be equipped with a detailed index, especially as the book is likely to become a standard text for college and school use.

THE NOTION COUNTER: A FARRAGO OF FOIBLES: BEING NOTES ABOUT NOTHING. By Nobody. Illustrated by Somebody. Dedicated to Everybody. Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press.

A HANDFUL of the most entertaining short-pieces printed in the *Atlantic's* "Contributors' Club" are here bound in a gay gingham cover under the title "The Notion Counter." The pencil of a master of line has "embellished" these bits of fancy goods with unpretentious but remarkably effective drawings in scale—mechanically and artistically—with the text. Besides the first skit, the remarks upon the pessimistic atmosphere which pervades dyeing establishments, upon the amazing, even affectionate, democracy which is in evidence in the places where ladies flock to buy bargains in pumps and slippers, and upon the extraordinary appearance in public of the contemporary "old lady," with two or three others, establish the merits of this uncommonly clever little book.

Mars Antony.